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CHAPTER VII

COORG

101 174 COORG was primarily inhabited by two distinct communities, the Yeravas and the Coorgs. The Yeravas are the modern representatives of the original inhabitants of Coorg who retired to the hills before the southward march of the Aryans and other communities and sought asylum there from aggressive invaders. At a later time, the Coorgs found in the jungles the means of satisfying their hunting propensities while the narrow passes afforded ample scope for their highly developed instincts to carry on their predatory excursions into the country of their wealthier and less warlike neighbours. Even now their fighting and sporting qualities reveal themselves in their socio-religious ceremonies. Their peculiar features are the product of their environment which stimulated a special type of culture among them. The hilly character of the country shielded them from aggression and conquest.

Origin and Early History

141 174 Sir Thomas Holland describes the Coorgs as the finest race without any exception in Southern India and considers them as even superior to the Brahmans in respect of skin colour, stature and prominence of the nose. They are taller than the Yeravas, have a finer nose, and have a larger head with a distinct tendency towards brachycephalism. Their average cephalic index is 80.6. Dr. Hutton states that " it appears to be a much simpler and more satisfactory view to regard the brachycephalic stock as preceding the Aryans. We may suppose them to have entered into the Indus Valley during the Mohenjo Daru period and to have extended down to the west coast as far as Coorg forming the physical basis of several of the brachycephalic or mesatocephalic castes of Western India."

174 Coorg inscriptions hardly throw any light on the early history of the Coorgs. They show that the province was successively connected with the Ganga dynasty, the Hoysala kings, the Nayaks of Belur, and the Lingayat Rajas of Coorg, as also with those of the Bednur family. It is said that new settlers must have been introduced into the province under various governments. This conjecture is supported by the Kaveri Purana, in its account of Matsyadesa, the Puranic name of Coorg. The Coorg Rajas were themselves aliens to the country and were Lingayats, while the Coorgs were the followers of ancestor-worship. They were the most numerous in the north-west of the province, where they were closely allied to the Mysoreans. In Pedinalkanad, the Malayalam element was predominant. Wynad which once formed part of Coorg must have afford-

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Physical and Mental Characters

The Coorgs are a hardy race. They have given proof of being brave soldiers and were much dreaded for their fierce intrepedity in encounters with their enemies. Military officers have commended their fitness for the formation of regiments. They are tall, muscular, broad-chested, strong limbed, and swift footed. Their colour is lighter than might be expected in this latitude. Their features are regular, often distinguished by an aquiline nose, and finely chiselled lips, set off by a well trimmed moustache. According to Holland, the Coorg is taller than the Yerava, has a finer nose, a larger head with a distinct tendency to brachycephalism, and a more perfect approach to orthognathism. Apart from anthropometric results, we have the contrast of colour between the fair (light brown) Coorg and the very dark skinned Yerava. The hair of the former is straight, while that of the Yerava is distinctly wavy, and the broad nose of the latter is accompanied by thick, slightly everted lips. The Coorgs and the Yeravas belong to two distinct ethnic types. The maximum, the minimum, and the average stature, cephalic and nasal indices are given below :

	Stature		Cephalic Index		Nasal Index	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Max.	184.5	166.0	90.7	93.2	100.0	74.0
Min.	149.1	131.5	66.5	70.9	46.3	50.9
Avg.	167.1	151 2	80.6	82.9	65.2	60.3

The intellectual and moral faculties of the Coorgs have been for ages dormant for want of opportunities. Consequently they have been observed to be ignorant and superstitious in common with people of lower cultures. The march of civilization during the last 50 years has brought considerable improvement. English schools for boys and girls have been started in important centres. It has been found that Coorg students are by no means backward in intellectual brightness and acquisitiveness. They have a high standard of morality in common with their brethren in other parts of India.

Language

Richter believes that there is a close relationship between the Kodagu and other Dravidian languages ; but being neither cultivated beyond its colloquial use, nor possessing any original literature, it hardly deserves the distinction of being elevated into a special Dravidian language, as Bishop Caldwell does. It may be considered a more local dialect.

Conclusion

The Coorgs numbered 41,026 in the Census of 1931, 20,752 being males and 20,274 females. Their mode of life and pride of race impart to their whole bearing an air of manly independence and dignified self-assertion.